

# ***Who Cares If Police Become Violent? Explaining Approval of Police Use of Force Using a National Sample\****

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Understanding police violence is important in part because police violence, if generally tolerated, could transform a society based on law into one governed by political and personal whim. This research asks whether the conflict perspective can explain which groups are more likely to approve of police use of force, and whether several dimensions of power are at issue or just a few. Previous studies have found that race is the most important factor in determining approval of police use of force. Gender, age, class, and other variables have shown mixed results. Using a national sample (1998 General Social Survey), this paper contributes a more comprehensive examination of this issue to the small body of literature in this area. We look at approval of police use of force in five scenarios. Our findings show that minorities and women are more likely to disapprove of police use of force. Supporting a narrow application of conflict theory, other dimensions of power appear not to affect attitudes toward police hitting citizens. Context of violence matters too. When situations are not actively threatening for officers, by near consensus, violence is unacceptable. Disagreement comes from less clear-cut circumstances.

## **Introduction**

Within the past decade, several high profile cases of alleged police brutality have occurred in the United States. In 1991, members of the Los Angeles Police Department were videotaped beating motorist Rodney King. In 1992, Malice Green died from injuries sustained after being beaten by Detroit police (Scrivner 1994). In 1997, New York City police officers were accused of holding down Haitian immigrant Abner Louima while another officer sodomized him with a broomstick (Austin 2000). Then, in 1999, an unarmed immigrant named Amadou Diallo was shot at 41 times and hit 19 times, by New York City's Street Crimes Unit (Nelson 2000). Recently, the Los Angeles Police Department has been investigated for numerous allegations of police brutality and misconduct that may have lead to the deaths or imprisonment of innocent or unarmed suspects (Nelson 2000).

Sensational cases of police violence are typically prosecuted in courts, but they tend to be seen as isolated by the public, not a product of systemic problems. They have not prompted widespread movements to control police brutality through comprehensive reform. Weitzer (2002) points out that disapproval of police departments increases after publicized incidents of brutality, but disapproval does not become entrenched, especially among whites. In fact, it is common to find majority approval of police even when the majority believes the police are brutal and racist. Indeed, our view is that reaction tends to range from

excusing the behavior to turning the discussion to point out how most police do a tough job and get too little respect for it. Moreover, as extreme cases continue to surface, researchers have yet to devote much time or energy to investigating public attitudes toward police use of force (Cullen, Cao, Frank, Langworthy, Browning, Kopache, and Stevenson 1996; Flanagan and Vaughn 1996).

The issue of police brutality is important for those concerned with the preservation of liberties for average citizens of the United States. As Bittner (1967) reports, police officers often work to maintain order, not enforce the law. It is not difficult to imagine scenarios where unbridled police power can have chilling effects on community activities and political involvement. Civil liberties are more easily denied if citizens give automatic approval to police turning to violence to achieve their goals.

The small amount of research on this topic presents inconsistent findings and often relies on samples limited to select populations or areas. Among other things, two contributions of our work are that: (1) we synthesize the relevant literature on attitudes toward the police, applying it to approval of police use of force; and (2) we use more methodologically and statistically appropriate techniques to study the issue.

The current research uses a national sample of Americans (the General Social Survey) to examine how two clusters of factors affect attitudes toward police use of force: (1) demographic characteristics and (2) social attitudes. This study will clarify ambiguities existing in current research on contributors approving of police violence. Previous results from studies that used nonrepresentative samples or samples from specific geographic areas, or from studies that did not control for important factors, will be tested using a more representative national sample and more comprehensive model specification.

### **Background**

A prominent explanation of law creation and enforcement activities is conflict theory (Chambliss 1969; Quinney 1974; Turk 1969). This perspective explains that the interests of powerful persons are protected and advocated through political and legal systems and activities. The conflict perspective takes the position that the poor (Chambliss 1975; Quinney 1974, 1977; Spitzer 1975) and minorities (Chiricos and Crawford 1995; Hawkins 1987; Jackson and Carroll 1981) represent a threat to the position of more powerful members of societies. The less powerful, (lower-class persons and minorities, for example) are scrutinized and controlled much more frequently than others as agents of the state concentrate on protecting the resources and values of the more powerful.

Hawkins (1987) points out how powerless persons will be adversely affected depends on the social context to which one refers. This modified conflict perspective moves beyond the original discussion of class issues to

assert that other dimensions of power such as race may factor into punishment decisions. Indeed, race can be a stronger determinant of criminal justice activity than class (Liska, Chamlin, and Reed 1985). Therefore, one must account for who the powerful are, and what their interests are, before determining whom the law will impact and how. Accordingly, one issue is whether evidence supports a broader view of conflict theory that asserts that many dimensions of power are at work, or whether evidence supports a narrower view that asserts that only a smaller subset of dimensions are at work in attitudes toward police use of force.

Conflict theorists typically look at the effects of power on the activities of legal entities such as the police, politicians, or governments. This research examines the role of power among everyday citizens' attitudes toward police activities. From the broader view of the conflict perspective, public support of police activities will be positively correlated with the stake that members of the public have in the status quo. That is, society's "winners" have little to fear from police activity and much to gain, but the "losers" have little to gain but much to lose. This is because police activity will support the prevailing attitudes and conditions of the powerful in their community. Police and judicial activity will be more aggressive and discriminatory in places with larger disparities in power. As police represent "law in action," those persons with more power will support police use of force (after all it is aimed at those who ought to be controlled) and those with less power will show more reticence in supporting police physical violence.

However, from the narrower view of the conflict perspective, approval of police use of force may be limited to particular dimensions of power. As Liska, Chamlin, and Reed (1985:35) pointed out, "As the crime rate, or even the reported crime rate, is not very visible, many people may gauge the threat of crime by the presence of people they associate with crime, especially when they are marked by visible racial characteristics." Perhaps only those dimensions of power that are culturally linked to crime will be related to attitudes supporting the police.

Empirically, support for police use of force has been attributed to many factors. Determining which factors are most important, however, is difficult because previous research shows conflicting results. In addition, there has been little research regarding attitudes toward police use of force. Cullen et al. (1996) noted, however, that research on overall attitudes toward law enforcement *personnel* can be very good indicators of attitudes toward police use of force. From a conflict perspective, we will review research on police use of force, as well as attitudes toward police in general, to assess what we know to date about how and why people support or oppose police violence.

**Race.** Overall, racial minorities have less power in American society. Studies that have specifically investigated attitudes toward police use of force have

found that minorities generally disapprove of police violence (Arthur 1993; Arthur and Case 1994; Cullen et al. 1996). Other studies have indicated that minorities feel the criminal justice system is biased in general, and that minorities are unable to receive fair treatment from police and the larger judicial system. Furthermore, they believe that police are more likely to hassle minorities simply because of their race (Albrecht and Green 1977; Browning, Cullen, Cao, Kopache, and Stevenson 1994; Hagan and Albonetti 1982; Henderson, Cullen, Cao, Browning, and Kopache 1997; Weitzer 2000; Weitzer and Tuch 1999).

Because attitudes toward police use of force have been shown to change when people witness brutal police encounters in the media (Leff, Protess, and Brooks 1986), Lasley (1994) conducted a study to determine how the citizens of Los Angeles were affected by the media coverage of the Rodney King beating. He found that overall support for police violence declined after the incident, and approval remained lower among blacks, while approval among whites and Hispanics began to increase months after the incident.

Subsequently, Weitzer (2002) found similar rebounding of approval in Los Angeles following publicized incidents, but slowly growing disapproval in New York after recurring incidents of brutality. He also found that blacks and Hispanics are more likely than whites to disapprove of the police, to see racism in their actions, and to see them using excessive force. However, he did not focus on an even more telling fact in his data. It is common to find majority approval of the police in the two cities even when a majority of respondents report that they believe the police are brutal and guilty of bias against minorities. This fact, most noticeable among whites, is highlighted by New York data for March, 1999, where 56 percent of whites agreed that the police used brutality against blacks, 33 percent felt they used excessive force, but only 9 percent of whites stated that the police were doing a poor job.

One study, however, countered the claim that blacks are more likely to hold a negative view of the police than whites (Frank, Brandl, Cullen, and Stichman 1996), but supports the conflict perspective. This study found that some blacks living in Detroit actually hold more positive views of the police than whites. The findings of this research may be a result of the racial makeup of the city government within Detroit. The authors of the study clearly indicated that:

In Detroit, African-Americans [sic] are a substantial majority of the population; the city has had a black mayor since 1973, and a significant number of major municipal government officeholders are black; nearly 50 percent of the police force is black, as are the chief and a substantial number of administrators in the department. (pp. 331–32)

The racial situation of Detroit's city government may lead black residents of that city, because of their majority status, to hold different views of the police than minorities in other cities.<sup>1</sup> Schuman and Gruenberg (1970:247) explained

that "black dissatisfaction tends to be greater in cities where blacks constitute a *smaller* proportion of the population." They believe that those cities that have large numbers of African Americans are more likely to take the concerns of their minority citizens more seriously than other cities. African Americans in Detroit, then, may feel as though the police and politicians take their concerns about police practices more seriously than leaders of other cities.

While these studies partially contradict previous findings, they may provide valuable insight into why other studies show differences between whites and blacks in terms of attitudes toward police. In a national sample, most black respondents would not be living in an area with a government so heavily influenced by same-race individuals. Perhaps in racially unfriendly contexts, blacks will be more compelled to question the motivations and behaviors of public officials, especially the police whom they may perceive as targeting them because of race.

**Social Class.** Conflict theory is rooted in the idea that the economically powerful manipulate law to protect their interests. Not surprisingly, two indicators of social class have been linked to approval of police use of force: income and education.

Previous work showed income affecting how people view the police. People in lower-income brackets tend to have more negative attitudes toward the police than do those in middle-income or upper-income categories (Cao, Frank, and Cullen 1996; Parker, Onyekwuluje, and Murty 1995). Indeed, police control over less powerful people, especially among the poor, ought to strain relations between police and lower-income persons.

Unquestionably, educated persons have a greater stake in U.S. society, and are more powerful and advantaged. One would expect more education, therefore, to produce more favorable police attitudes. However, an opposing view is that higher education makes people more critical and aware of social injustices and the common human experience. This alternative line of thinking leads one to the view that higher education leads to more criticism of the police.

The empirical evidence matches the conflicting logic on education. Some researchers found that educated persons are more likely to view the police more negatively (Thomas and Hyman 1977) while others saw more support for police (Arthur and Case 1994). Researchers who have looked at variations in education among blacks have found similarly conflicting results. Some found that educated black persons perceive more injustice in police actions (Peek, Lowe, and Alston 1981; Weitzer and Tuch 1999, 2002; Wortley, Hagan, and Macmillan 1997) whereas others found that educated black persons are more positive toward police than other blacks (Priest and Carter 1999).

Interestingly, Weitzer and Tuch (2002) explained that middle-class blacks are more educated about police biases and are more likely to experience obviously race-based profiling such as being stopped by police for "inappropriate"

activities such as driving nicer cars or being in the “wrong” neighborhood. Encounters with police may also lead to feelings of being treated less favorably than they feel their middle-class status warrants. Facing these dynamics, middle-class blacks may view the police as having more bias against minorities. On the other hand, Wortley, Hagan, and Macmillan (1997) found that educated black persons become more positive in their attitudes toward police in the context of a highly sensationalized murder involving a black defendant. The inconsistent findings may point to the awareness raising of education that informs black persons of their less powerful position relative to whites, on the one hand, and the social advantages that accrue with education may make better educated black persons more susceptible to the view that the police are protecting them, on the other.

**Sex.** Sex is yet another variable where more research is needed in order to understand how it affects attitudes concerning police use of force. While research on the effects of sex on criminal processing has contradicted the conflict perspective, finding that women tend to be treated more favorably (Bishop and Frazier 1996; Daly 1989, 1994), there is no denying that women continue to have less power than men. Consistently, previous work shows that women are more likely to oppose police use of force, but that men overall have more negative attitudes toward the police (Arthur 1993; Cao, Frank, and Cullen 1996).<sup>2</sup> Blumenthal, Kahn, Andrews, and Head (1972) found that men have a greater tendency to support the use of force by police—especially in the process of maintaining social control. The complexity of these results may reflect the greater power of men accompanied by their tendency to be more violent, but also to be the victims of violence and targets of police scrutiny.

**Age.** In the United States, aging is accompanied by increasing economic and political power and increasing prestige. However, there is no clear consensus in the research on the way age affects support of police violence (Arthur 1993; Arthur and Case 1994; Cullen et al. 1996). Some research has shown that simply looking at older versus younger respondents does not provide a clear, concise answer to the question of which cohort approves or disapproves of police and police practices (Peek, Alston, and Lowe 1978). It is also interesting to note that one study actually finds that white youth dislike police more than black youth (Peek, Lowe, and Alston 1981). From the conflict perspective, one expects older persons to be more established and have a greater stake in police protection, therefore one expects support for police use of force to go up with age.

**Marital Status.** Individuals who are single or divorced tend to have more negative attitudes toward the police (Parker, Onyekwuluje, and Murty 1995; Scaglion and Condon 1980). Research showing this, however, has approached

this variable quite superficially, simply reporting that single or divorced individuals are more negative in their attitudes toward the police than those who are married, not explaining the negative attitudes. Consistent with a conflict approach, those defying social convention by being unmarried, single and divorced might view those persons charged with enforcing conformity, the police, with greater skepticism. In addition, married persons may feel that they have homes and families to protect and that police provide a helping hand with those tasks.

***Living Conditions.*** Another important factor said to affect attitudes toward police is residential location. Individuals who live in inner-city areas are more likely to hold negative opinions about law enforcement officials (Albrecht and Green 1977; Hagan and Albonetti 1982). The reason for the difference in attitudes of inner-city residents and suburbanites toward the police may be associated with crime rates (Parker, Onyekwuluje, and Murty 1995). Those individuals who live in inner-city areas typically face higher crime rates, on average, than residents of suburban or rural areas (Rennison 2000). Residents who live in high-crime areas may simply have negative attitudes toward the police because they feel that the police are not doing enough to protect them. Indeed, conflict theorists would note that police do not work poor neighborhoods in order to protect the people living in them, but rather to control the local population.

Weitzer (1999) has suggested that residents of middle-class neighborhoods hold more positive views of police because they are sheltered from acts of brutality committed by law enforcement personnel. Specifically, blacks that live in middle-class neighborhoods may experience isolation from racial bias by police officers because of the social context of their living conditions. This leads to the conclusion that residents of higher-crime areas hold negative views of the police not because of the crime itself, but because they are actually viewed with suspicion by the police even when they are not committing any crime at all.

***Confidence in Institutions.*** Finally, those with more power in a society have greater confidence in the institutions of that society. Indeed, institutional arrangements produce, and are the products of, the ways power is distributed. Police represent an institutional presence in people's everyday lives, so it is not surprising that those individuals who actually have less confidence in social institutions such as the courts are less likely to support police violence (Arthur 1993). Commensurately, if people feel that the courts are being too lenient with alleged criminals, they have higher levels of support for police use of force (Arthur and Case 1994). From the perspective of the powerful, the police force is among the institutions that should contribute to maintaining their way of life.

Overall, the current literature regarding attitudes toward police and police practices prompts more questions about approval of police violence. While

characteristics such as race have been shown to affect attitudes toward police violence, the literature also shows some contradictions. For most of these factors, no definitive statement has been made about how they affect attitudes toward police use of force. The preceding review of research, however, lends support to a conflict perspective on approval of police violence. Persons from groups that wield more power in American society appear to want police to have more leeway in how they deal with the public. More research, however, is clearly needed to determine the ways; when assessed together, these factors affect attitudes toward police violence.

***Research Expectations.*** Our analysis centers on testing the expectations established by conflict theory and the empirical literature. These suggest the following:

- Belonging to less powerful demographic groups will lead to lesser approval of police violence as measured by our five dependent variables. Women and minorities will show less approval of police violence. We also expect younger persons, the less educated, lower-class persons, and unmarried individuals to be less likely to approve of police use of force.
- Social attitudes will affect support for police use of force. Conflict theory suggests that those who demonstrate more concern for the less powerful will display less support for police use of force. Persons with liberal political views will have less support for police violence. Those believing that government should provide assistance for poor and minority persons will show less support for police violence. Those living in neighborhoods with more crime, and those with less confidence in institutions, will do the same.
- Finally, the wide-ranging literature on attitudes toward police leads us to expect a broader applicability of conflict theory with many dimensions of power implicated in explaining support for police use of force.

### **Methods**

This research makes methodological improvements over previous research in this area. Our research tests attitudes toward police use of force with a national sample. Previous work has often relied on regional or select samples. With this sample, we can capture more of the variation that occurs across the United States, and can make statements that are generalizable to the U.S. population. Moreover, using a national sample could reveal misspecifications in previous research by demonstrating the dependence of some findings on the select populations used. In other words, some variables may be linked to approval of police use of force only in select communities, indicating effects from extraneous factors, not the variable itself.



In addition, this work tests a better-specified model of approval of police use of force. Our research combines concepts said to be related to attitudes toward police and their use of force that have been studied separately in previous research. Our analyses also make it possible to see the independent effects of important variables while controlling for others.

### *Sample*

We use a nationally representative sample survey of U.S. households, the 1998 General Social Survey (GSS) (Davis and Smith 1999). The GSS is conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago on a biennial basis in face-to-face interviews with English-speaking adults. The GSS employs a full-probability sample, which means that all noninstitutionalized Americans have an equal chance of being selected for the survey. Selection occurs via multistage sampling of households. One interview per household leads to underrepresentation of those in larger households. Also, younger persons (because of college or military housing) and elderly persons (because of institutional assisted living) are more likely to be excluded from the sample. The 1998 survey had a response rate of 76 percent. Davis and Smith (1999) provide further technical details about GSS sampling procedures.

The GSS currently uses a split-sample design consisting of three different ballots, and two subsamples, which allows for the introduction of new topical modules during each survey, while also maintaining a consistent subset of questions across surveys for the purpose of analysis over time. Selection of ballots for respondents is randomly determined meaning that there is no systematic selection bias affecting which version of the survey one receives (Davis and Smith 1999). In the current study, all questions used in the analyses come from version 3, ballot C of the 1998 survey. Because of the split-sample design employed by the GSS, the total sample size is reduced ( $N = 498$ ).

Mean substitution is used in situations of a “don’t know” or “no answer” response for some variables in order to prevent a large loss of cases.<sup>3</sup> Not substituting for the dependent variables and two independent variables<sup>4</sup> reduces the original sample from 498 for each set of models.

Our sample has more women (56.2 percent) than is found in the larger population. This is not surprising because men are generally harder to contact for surveys, and once contacted, refuse participation at higher rates than women. In addition, African Americans are also overrepresented in the sample (15.7 percent).

### *Measures*

In order to measure support for the use of force by police personnel, we use five questions from the 1998 GSS that asked respondents about their approval of police striking citizens. (For a list of variables used, with individual coding

schemes, see the Appendix.) The five include one general question, "Are there any situations you can imagine in which you would approve of a policeman striking an adult male citizen?" and four additional, more specific questions, "Would you approve of a policeman striking a citizen who: (1) was attempting to escape from custody? (2) was attacking the policeman with his fists? (3) was being questioned as a suspect in a murder case? and (4) had said vulgar and obscene things to the policeman?" The responses for the question are coded as 0 = No and 1 = Yes. We recode "not sure" responses as missing values because it is not appropriate to assume that "not sure" falls between approval and disapproval of police violence.

The use of five dependent variables makes the analyses more comprehensive. Use of general questions tends to prompt respondents to give decontextualized general opinions that may draw on general fears and worry, whereas more specific questions better approximate respondents' experiences and draw on mundane, actual decision-making processes (Applegate, Cullen, Turner, and Sundt 1996; Jacoby and Cullen 1999). We examine both global attitudes and thoughts associated with specific scenarios. Clearly, our first question will prompt contextless general opinions about police violence that might not correspond with how respondents would react in actual circumstances. This, however, is corrected for with four specific scenarios that might reveal more of the complexity of thinking about police use of force.

Each type of question has its value. Findings that show that groups vary on global measures of approval of police violence will reveal differences between groups on their *underlying orientations* to the issue. Upon finding a difference, one has to ask why one group's general ideas about police use of force are different from another's. Questions about specific scenarios offer more contextualized glimpses of how groups will react across a range of actual circumstances. Differences here will prompt questions about characteristics of a situation that make police violence more acceptable to one group but not the other.

Our independent variables are grouped into two sets. We call these: (1) demographics and (2) social attitudes.

**Demographics.** We use several measures of demographic characteristics that are reportedly relevant to attitudes toward police violence. We use two dichotomous variables for race: *Black* (black = 1, else = 0) and *Other* (other = 1, else = 0). This is done to add a level of distinction between minority groups and to evaluate whether members of other racial groups have levels of approval about police violence that are closer to the levels of approval of whites than of blacks. Sex is coded as a dummy variable, *Female* (Female = 1). We code *Age* using the respondent's exact age in years. (Analyses not presented show that coding age with a series of dummy variables to represent cohorts would not change our reported findings.)

We measure class position with education and income. We use a dichotomous variable, *High School*, for a respondent's level of education, where 1 equals a high school education or less, compared to the excluded group, varying levels of a college education—ranging from an associate's degree through graduate school. *Income* is measured on a scale from 1 to 5 formed by collapsing the 23 categories in the GSS. Our collapsed scale is intended to correct for the unequal intervals in the original measure (see the Appendix for new ranges).

We use two variables to measure how a person's marriage history affects his or her attitudes toward police use of force: one for those who have never been married, *Never Married*, and one for those who are divorced, separated, or widowed, *Formerly Married*. Currently married is the excluded group for both variables.

***Social Attitudes.*** We measure *Political Views* with respondents' ratings of their political views on a seven-point scale, ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. We also measure respondents' attitudes concerning the government's role in providing help for the poor and minorities with a scale comprised of two variables: one that asks if the government is responsible for taking care of the poor, and one that asks if the government has an obligation to help blacks improve their standard of living. Both items are coded on a three-point scale. The new variable, *Favor Government Assistance*, is created by adding the values of each variable and dividing by three (Chronbach's  $\alpha = .57$ ).

To estimate and control for the effects that neighborhood characteristics may have on attitudes toward police, we use the variable *Fear of Neighborhood Crime*. This dichotomous variable measures respondents' reports of whether they are afraid to walk alone in their neighborhood at night. The final variable, *Confidence in Institutions*, is measured by a scale formed from six GSS questions that assess level of confidence in social institutions in the United States: (1) banks and financial institutions, (2) Congress, (3) education, (4) medicine, (5) the military, and (6) the press. Formed by adding the items and dividing by six, our test of reliability shows moderate support for scaling (Chronbach's  $\alpha = .64$ ).

### ***Analysis***

Although others have used Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression on questions like ours in previous analyses (Arthur 1993; Arthur and Case 1994), we use logistic regression. This technique is more appropriate because the dependent variables are binary. If OLS regression were used, several important assumptions would be violated (Long 1997). For example, using OLS regression on a binary variable may cause inefficient coefficients, leading to incorrect test statistics. Also, OLS often predicts values of binary dependent variables beyond the limits of zero and one. Another important consideration is that OLS regression

assumes that the variables being tested act upon each other in a linear fashion. Because we are calculating the effects of independent variables on the probability that subjects will support police use of force, it is more appropriate to assume a nonlinear relationship exists between the variables.

The analyses for each of the five dependent variables proceed through three models, organized by the centrality of variables to previous research. Model 1 includes demographic variables because most of the literature on attitudes toward police violence shows that demographic factors play the most important role in determining attitudes on this topic. Model 2, with all the questions about social attitudes, is placed next. Model 3, however, removes the variables for fear and confidence to allow the reader to see the model without these two variables, which are arguably less central to our question of whether conflict theory is at work in determining the probability of supporting police use of force.

### Results

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the variables used in the current analyses. One immediately sees that the nature of police/citizen contact matters, and that there is apparent consensus of the respondents in a few of the situations. Only 7 percent of respondents approve of an officer hitting a person who is a murder suspect or who shouts obscenities. Apparently, these situations do not warrant physical violence. This does not mean, however, that respondents generally do not approve of the use of force. Ninety-two percent say an officer who is attacked with fists is justified in striking back. Lesser consensus is found with the other two questions. When a citizen is fleeing custody, 72 percent of respondents approve of an officer striking the person, indicating that the situation is severe for many subjects. Finally, over two-thirds of the respondents could think of a situation where they would approve of a police officer striking an adult male citizen in the initial question about police use of force. This contextless situation indicates a majority of respondents are inclined to justify police use of force. These findings on support for police use of force are reflective of data from previous General Social Surveys (Davis and Smith 1999). However, in each of the five scenarios, support for striking a citizen has declined over time, with the largest declines seen for an escaping citizen and a citizen saying obscenities.

In terms of demographic variables, the sample appears to be generally reflective of the overall American population. In addition, respondents in the sample appear to have moderate political views, moderate support for government providing assistance to the poor and minorities, and moderate confidence in institutions. Nearly half report being afraid to walk alone at night in their neighborhoods. Available upon request are zero-order correlations between all the variables used in the analyses. Most variables demonstrate little correlation

**Table 1**  
Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used to Analyze Approval of  
Police Striking a Citizen in Five Scenarios Taken from  
the 1998 General Social Survey

Variables	Mean	Range	S.D.
<i>Dependent Variables</i>			
<u>Approve of Policeman Striking:</u>			
% Adult male	69		
% Citizen escaping	72		
% Citizen attacking-fists	92		
% Murder suspect	7		
% Citizen saying obscenities	7		
<i>Independent Variables</i>			
<u>Demographics</u>			
% Female	56		
% Black	16		
% Other	6		
Age	45.76	18–89	17.35
% High school	70		
Income	2.36	1–5	1.23
% Never married	24		
% Formerly married	31		
<u>Social Attitudes</u>			
Political views	4.16	1–7	1.41
Favor government assistance	2.81	1–5	.97
% Fear neighborhood crime	44		
Confidence in institutions	2.10	1–3	.38
<i>N</i> = 472 to 498			

with the others, with the highest being a moderate correlation ( $r = -.44$ ) between never being married and age.

Tables 2 and 3 include the results of the logistic regressions in three models for each dependent variable. For the regressions of “approval of striking an adult male” on demographic characteristics, Model 1 shows that race and sex are significant variables. The coefficients show that women, blacks, those of other and mixed races tend to have less approval of police violence than their

**Table 2**  
 Logistic Regression Coefficients, (Standard Errors) in Parentheses, and *Exponentiated Coefficients* in Italics for the  
 Regression of Approval of Police Striking a Citizen in Three Scenarios on Variables Measuring Demographics and Social  
 Attitudes in the 1998 General Social Survey

Approve of striking:	Adult male			Citizen escaping			Citizen attacking-fists		
Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Demographics</i>									
Black	-1.225*** (.278) <i>.294</i>	-1.000*** (.295) <i>.368</i>	-.973*** (.293) <i>.378</i>	-.967*** (.282) <i>.380</i>	-.762* (.304) <i>.467</i>	-.780** (.301) <i>.458</i>	-1.076** (.401) <i>.341</i>	-.846+ (.433) <i>.429</i>	-.937* (.426) <i>.392</i>
Other	-1.365** (.433) <i>.255</i>	-1.419*** (.441) <i>.242</i>	-1.370** (.440) <i>.254</i>	-1.206** (.410) <i>.299</i>	-1.231** (.416) <i>.292</i>	-1.231** (.416) <i>.292</i>	-1.193* (.568) <i>.303</i>	-1.267* (.576) <i>.282</i>	-1.197* (.571) <i>.302</i>
Female	-.712** (.225) <i>.491</i>	-.832*** (.245) <i>.435</i>	-.683** (.228) <i>.505</i>	-1.114*** (.236) <i>.328</i>	-1.056*** (.249) <i>.348</i>	-1.082*** (.238) <i>.339</i>	-.819* (.392) <i>.441</i>	-.713+ (.417) <i>.490</i>	-.794* (.394) <i>.452</i>
High school	-.468+ (.263) <i>.626</i>	-.524+ (.269) <i>.592</i>	-.518+ (.268) <i>.596</i>	.037 (.255) <i>1.038</i>	.006 (.258) <i>1.006</i>	.011 (.259) <i>1.011</i>	.275 (.400) <i>1.316</i>	.228 (.404) <i>1.256</i>	.232 (.403) <i>1.261</i>
Income	.072 (.108) <i>1.075</i>	.046 (.111) <i>1.047</i>	.035 (.111) <i>1.036</i>	.023 (.107) <i>1.023</i>	.010 (.111) <i>1.010</i>	.003 (.110) <i>1.003</i>	.127 (.182) <i>1.136</i>	.129 (.188) <i>1.138</i>	.115 (.185) <i>1.121</i>
Age	-.007 (.007) <i>.993</i>	-.010 (.007) <i>.990</i>	-.010 (.007) <i>.990</i>	-.003 (.007) <i>.997</i>	-.007 (.007) <i>.993</i>	-.006 (.007) <i>.994</i>	-.017 (.011) <i>.983</i>	-.022+ (.012) <i>.979</i>	-.019+ (.012) <i>.981</i>

Never married	.379 (.320) <i>1.461</i>	.375 (.325) <i>1.455</i>	.402 (.323) <i>1.495</i>	.011 (.313) <i>1.011</i>	.031 (.319) <i>1.032</i>	.058 (.317) <i>1.060</i>	-.473 (.498) <i>.623</i>	-.556 (.509) <i>.874</i>	-.457 (.500) <i>.633</i>
Formerly married	.565* (.282) <i>1.760</i>	.554+ (.290) <i>1.739</i>	.608* (.288) <i>1.836</i>	.402 (.289) <i>1.494</i>	.458 (.296) <i>1.581</i>	.457 (.293) <i>1.579</i>	.189 (.476) <i>1.208</i>	.223 (.487) <i>1.250</i>	.227 (.479) <i>1.255</i>
<i>Social attitudes</i>									
Political views		.085 (.083) <i>1.089</i>	.108 (.081) <i>1.114</i>		.149+ (.084) <i>1.161</i>	.151+ (.082) <i>1.162</i>		.108 (.130) <i>1.114</i>	.110 (.129) <i>1.116</i>
Favor government assistance		-.277* (.123) <i>.758</i>	-.262* (.121) <i>.769</i>		-.188 (.129) <i>.828</i>	-.164 (.126) <i>.849</i>		-.199 (.200) <i>.819</i>	-.124 (.195) <i>.884</i>
Fear neighborhood crime		.403 (.247) <i>1.496</i>			.016 (.241) <i>1.016</i>			.065 (.382) <i>1.067</i>	
Confidence in institutions		-.133 (.285) <i>.875</i>			.463 (.289) <i>1.589</i>			1.175* (.470) <i>3.239</i>	
Constant	1.802** (.615)	2.630** (1.011)	2.280** (.844)	1.852** (.616)	.925 (1.011)	1.813* (.846)	3.694*** (1.010)	1.541 (1.618)	3.698** (1.375)
Model $\chi^2$	47.45***	58.31***	55.24***	45.58***	54.29***	51.70***	19.24*	27.07**	20.57*
Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.10	.12	.11	.09	.11	.11	.04	.06	.04
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.14	.17	.16	.13	.16	.15	.09	.13	.10
		<i>N</i> = 458			<i>N</i> = 467			<i>N</i> = 478	

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<sup>+</sup>*p* ≤ .1, \**p* ≤ .05, \*\**p* ≤ .01, \*\*\**p* ≤ .001.

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**Table 3**  
 Logistic Regression Coefficients, (Standard Errors) in Parentheses, and *Exponentiated Coefficients* in Italics for the  
 Regression of Approval of Police Striking a Citizen in Two Scenarios on Variables Measuring Demographics and  
 Social Attitudes in the 1998 General Social Survey

Approve of striking:	Murder suspect			Citizen saying obscenities		
Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Demographics</i>						
Black	-.081 (.519)	-.549 (.563)	-.582 (.560)	-.510 (.576)	-.575 (.617)	-.534 (.613)
	.922	.577	.559	.601	.563	.586
Other	.840 (.603)	.692 (.632)	.700 (.622)	-.603 (1.068)	-.719 (1.084)	-.665 (1.078)
	2.315	1.997	2.013	.547	.487	.514
Female	-.575 (.361)	-.670 <sup>+</sup> (.403)	-.562 (.368)	-.712 <sup>+</sup> (.384)	-.863* (.425)	-.700 <sup>+</sup> (.387)
	.563	.512	.570	.491	.422	.497
High school	.328 (.438)	.428 (.451)	.395 (.444)	.127 (.465)	.185 (.471)	.179 (.469)
	1.389	1.534	1.484	1.135	1.204	1.195
Income	-.067 (.180)	.092 (.184)	.046 (.182)	-.478* (.217)	-.445* (.222)	-.459* (.220)
	.935	1.096	1.047	.620	.641	.632
Age	.009 (.011)	.008 (.012)	.008 (.012)	.013 (.011)	.012 (.011)	.012 (.011)
	1.009	1.008	1.008	1.014	1.012	1.012



Never married	-.144 (.546)	-.163 (.551)	-.078 (.545)	-2.319* (1.079)	-2.306* (1.082)	-2.239* (1.078)
	.866	.850	.925	.098	.100	.107
Formerly married	.276 (.437)	.373 (.446)	.370 (.438)	.311 (.424)	.345 (.436)	.406 (.428)
	1.318	1.451	1.448	1.365	1.412	1.500
<i>Social Attitudes</i>						
Political views		.191 (.139)	.217 (.134)		.193 (.143)	.220 (.140)
		1.210	1.242		1.212	1.246
Favor government assistance		.579** (.209)	.616*** (.206)		.098 (.211)	.096 (.206)
		1.785	1.852		1.103	1.101
Fear neighborhood crime		.380 (.408)			.413 (.428)	
		1.462			1.511	
Confidence in institutions		.680 (.494)			-.035 (.507)	
		1.973			.965	
Constant	-2.825** (.994)	-7.305*** (1.822)	-5.851*** (1.446)	-1.732+ (1.005)	-2.922+ (1.715)	-3.000* (1.390)
Model $\chi^2$	6.87	20.04+	17.39+	29.39***	32.92**	31.97***
Cox and Snell R <sup>2</sup>	.01	.04	.04	.06	.07	.06
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	.04	.10	.09	.15	.17	.16
		N = 477			N = 481	

+ $p \leq .1$ , \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

comparison groups. While one can readily see the direction of the effects of the independent variables on *Adult Male*, because we are using logistic regression the reader should not interpret the values of the coefficients as direct, constant effects on the dependent variable. Rather, the equation of coefficients gives the log odds of the dependent variable equaling one. To simplify interpretation, we discuss the percent increase in the odds that the dependent variable equals one given a unit increase in the independent variable. Accordingly, while controlling for other demographic variables, the odds of women approving of police hitting a citizen in a contextless scenario decrease by 51 percent compared with those of men; the odds for blacks are 71 percent lower than those of whites; and showing even less support of police use of force, those of other and mixed races are 76 percent lower than whites. Unexpectedly, the formerly married are more likely than the married to approve of an officer hitting an adult male. Age and class variables are not key factors in determining how individuals feel about police violence.

Model 2 adds variables for social attitudes. Contradicting our expectations, this model indicates that political ideology, neighborhood fears, and confidence in institutions have no significant effects on attitudes concerning police using force in the *Adult Male* scenario. On the other hand, parsimony and a nonsignificant change in chi-square indicate that Model 3 is the better model. In it, race, sex, and level of education remain significant, and for each unit increase in reported support of government help for the poor and minorities, the odds of approving of police use of force decrease by 23 percent. It is striking that even when controlling for other demographic variables and social attitudes, race and sex remain strong predictors of support for police use of force.

When looking at the results for *Citizen Escaping*, we find many similarities, but some differences. This situation is contextualized, so the effects of the independent variables are likely to vary from those in the contextless scenario. Recall that, in general, over two-thirds of the respondents thought it was alright for an officer to hit a person in this situation—this is a situation where the public generally sees violence as legitimate.

Model 1 demonstrates that women, black persons and other minorities are less likely to approve of violence in this situation. That remains true through Model 3, as social attitudes have no impact on predicting approval of police hitting an escaping citizen. The odds of women approving of police violence in this situation decrease by 67 percent of those of men; blacks' odds are decreased by 53 percent of those for whites; and other races' odds of approval decrease by over 70 percent compared with whites. Consistent only with a narrower application of the conflict perspective, even when controlling for what are purported to be predictors of approval of police behaviors, race and sex remain robust predictors of attitudes.

For the third scenario, where respondents are asked about their attitudes toward police striking a citizen who is hitting them with fists, *Citizen Attacking-Fists*, there was very high approval of police hitting back. The logistic regressions indicate that there is not as much explanatory power for the various independent variables. In the first model, race and sex are once again the only significant variables. The only other variable having an effect in subsequent models is *Confidence in Institutions*. Odds of support for police hitting someone attacking them more than double with each unit increase in confidence. This is the only scenario where confidence is significant, indicating that the scenario of hitting an officer may be particularly indicative of an assault on an institution. *Other* race remains significant, and if using a one-tail-test criterion, *Female* and *Black* are significant in the direction hypothesized.

The fourth and fifth scenarios will be considered together. These situations, *Murder Suspect* and *Citizen Saying Obscenities*, found high public disapproval of police using force. In other words, these are situations where the vast majority of respondents view police violence as unwarranted. Reflecting that consensus, and in contrast with the previous three scenarios, these display very few effects of the independent variables, and quite different effects where they exist.

In these last two scenarios, race is not, and sex is only weakly, related to approval of police use of force. Basically, whites and men tend to agree with minorities and women that police violence should not be approved of in these instances. *Favor Government Assistance* is the only variable affecting *Murder Suspect* (and none of the models show a good fit). Ironically, the effect is in the opposite direction as that found in the contextless scenario. For each level increase in *Favor Government Assistance*, the odds of supporting police violence increase by 84 percent. So those who think the government should help poor persons and minorities are more likely see justification in police using force against someone being questioned for murder. In speculation, the reversal in sentiment seen in this variable may stem from respondents viewing police as aggressors against the helpless in the contextless situation, but focusing on a helpless victim of murder in the murder suspect scenario.

*Never Married* and *Income* are the only variables with effects on *Citizen Saying Obscenities*. The effect of *Income* is opposite that hypothesized. These effects may reflect greater belief in freedom of expression among wealthier people and those who do not have families yet.

Given the literature that race may interact with class to create differences in approval of police and use of force, we created interaction variables for *Black* with *High School*, *Black* with *Income*, *Other* with *High School*, and *Other* with *Income*. We introduced these variables individually into Model 2 for each of the five dependent variables. These analyses (not shown as they do not contribute to the findings, but available upon request) showed that only two of the 20

interaction terms were significant. These were found in the model for *Murder Suspect* and are for the interactions of *Black* with *High School* ( $p < .05$ ) and *Income* ( $p < .01$ ). As black respondents move up a level in education or income, their odds of supporting police violence against a murder suspect increase. The effects of *Female* and *Favor Government Assistance* remain stable across the models. Because these interaction terms are nonsignificant in other models, and the other interaction terms are not at all significant, we conclude that the interaction of class with race is not a strong factor in determining approval of police striking citizens in general. We see no evidence supporting the idea that educated black persons become more critical of the police. Like those who favor government assistance to the poor and minorities, upper class black persons may have been more focused on murder victims when answering the survey about murder suspects, becoming more supportive of police use of force.

We also introduced interaction terms for sex and race, individually for white, black, and other. We found little indication that sex and race interact to determine approval or disapproval of police use of force overall. The only significant interaction was for *Female* and *Black* ( $p < .01$ ) for the contextless scenario of striking an adult male. Indeed, the two root variables became nonsignificant—other effects remained the same—when the interaction was introduced (*Black*  $p = .554$ ; *Female*  $p = .056$ ), indicating that black females largely influence the findings of the effects of *Female* and *Black* on this variable.

Furthermore, prompted by research that found younger whites more negative toward police than younger blacks (Peek, Alston, and Lowe 1978) we introduced interaction terms for race and age individually for white, black, and other. None of these interactions was significant, indicating that age is not affecting respondents differently by race.

In a final exercise (available upon request), we combined (added) our dependent variables where approval of police use of force is normative (citizen escaping and attacking) and where disapproval is normative (murder suspect and obscenities), and ran OLS regressions on the resulting variables using the same model structure as in the logistic regressions. We do not favor OLS with the resulting three-level variables to the logistic regressions, but we decided to check the effects of such modeling because the combined variables may tap sentiment toward situations where police use of force is generally acceptable and where it is not. The additional tests supported the preceding discussion and added no new complexities.

Overall, most of our research expectations are not met. The analyses, however, show the importance of context and of race and sex in determining how individuals will feel about police use of force. The situations where there is general approval of police use of force, including the contextless scenario, the citizen escaping, and the citizen attacking with fists, show that minorities—

blacks, as well as those of other and mixed races—have more negative attitudes regarding police violence than whites.<sup>5</sup> The current analyses also indicate that women are more likely than men to disapprove of police violence. Indeed, minorities and women are consistently the more likely dissenters from the prevailing public approval of police use of force. It is only when the public in general disapproves of police striking citizens that minorities and women are unquestionably in agreement with whites and men.

Furthermore, no other variable has consistent effects across scenarios for approving of police using force. The only non-race or sex variable having an effect on more than one dependent variable, *Favor Government Assistance*, reverses its valence from *Adult Male* to *Murder Suspect*.

It is important to emphasize that in our analyses, purportedly important predictors of attitudes toward police violence are commonly not statistically significant. However, the effects of race and sex are robust, remaining in the models for scenarios where approval is normative even when controlling for many purportedly good predictors of attitudes toward the police. Nothing more than a narrow application of the conflict perspective is supported with the analyses on the GSS sample.

### Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the current research which employs a national sample concur with previous studies that have reported that race is the most important factor in determining what an individual will think about police violence. The results of this research indicate that racial minorities are more likely to disapprove of police use of force. Furthermore, women are more likely to disapprove of police violence than men. These results are also consistent with a view that conflict theory is narrowly applicable to the public's views on police use of force. Few dimensions of power appear to be at play in the public's attitudes.

Our results may reflect what others have suggested, that minorities seem to hold negative views about police use of force because of a pattern of brutality toward minorities by police departments in the United States, as well as a general distrust in police. Women, however, may hold negative views regarding police violence because they are less inclined than men to view the use of force as being an appropriate method of keeping social order.

Considering the variation by context, our analyses do not depict men and whites as always ready to defend police using force against citizens. There are clearly scenarios where whites and men assert that police use of force is unjustified. On the other hand, men and whites can be more easily convinced of the appropriateness of police hitting citizens. In "gray" situations, such as escape and the contextless scenario, these groups are more likely to see justification for police hitting.

Some of our findings hint at support of a broader application of the conflict perspective, but their lack of consistency in the models indicates that they are not generally at play. In some instances, factors such as insensitivity to the needs of the poor and minorities and confidence in institutions will increase the likelihood of approval of police use of force. On the other hand, several variables that would support a broader applicability of the conflict perspective show opposite, none, or only weak effects. For example, higher education tends to have no effect on support of police hitting citizens while income has the opposite effect predicted in one scenario. Marital status has no consistent effects, and political views and fear of neighborhood crime have no predictive power.

Perhaps the limited power of conflict theory to explain approval of police use of force derives from an image of those the police try to control, making most demographic characteristics and social attitudes irrelevant to persons' outlook on police violence. Our view is that our findings demonstrate the intersection of fairly stable ideas about policing and the ability to sympathize with prospective victims. The idea is that persons have fairly set notions about who the criminals "out there" are (i.e., minorities), and who the police tend to be (i.e., men). The ways these images affect approval of police use of force will be mediated to varying degrees by personal characteristics and the context of police actions. The behaviors of police and functions of policing may be the product of disparity between the beneficiaries and victims of the social order, but the attitudes toward police behavior may be premised on readily accessible schemas—perhaps a product of America's moral panic about young blacks and crime (Chambliss 1995)—that are invoked when details of an incident are not easily determined. Minorities and women will have greater doubts than whites and men that police violence is appropriate. Indeed, our findings are consistent with the assertion by Cullen et al. (1996) that blacks have a different crime ideology from that of whites. It appears that women too could have independent ideologies. Perhaps we may conceptualize the two groups as more likely to adopt a personal conflict perspective toward the police, being less inclined to believe the police are not abusive toward less powerful persons.

We found that context matters in the determination of approval of police striking citizens. However, the questions we used do not vary the contexts by other important factors such as race of the officer or race of the citizen being hit. Related to this, Levin and Thomas (1997) found that under experimental conditions, both whites and blacks see more violence and illegality when a white officer arrests a black man than when a black officer is involved in such an arrest. Thinking back to Weitzer's (2002) work on Los Angeles and New York, however, seeing bias does not necessarily translate into disapproval of police. The findings reported here indicate the need to gather more research on race in cases of police brutality. Race has the potential to mitigate or exacerbate

attitudes of respondents even in the scenarios where there is consensus approval or disapproval of police use of force. Indeed, perceptions of these variations may differ by race too.

To the extent that Americans continue to view criminals as violent minorities, we expect support for police use of force in “questionable” cases to continue. However, to the extent that minorities and women continue to gain a stronger political voice, we expect support for police brutality to decline. Speaking to one of our concerns, the erosion of civil liberties, our findings indicate that increasing power among women and minorities will serve to protect liberties. On the other hand, the perpetuation of the “black, male” image of criminals probably increases whites’ more favorable attitude toward police behaviors.

From a public relations perspective, there is clearly useful information in these analyses. The context of police use of force will make a difference in whether the public will find such behavior acceptable. When citizens are in situations that are not actively threatening officers, the public, by near consensus, indicates that violence is unacceptable. In a situation where an officer is being attacked, the public will typically accept the violence as justified, arguably, even minorities and women. However, if the situation is not threatening to the officer and is not clearly contained, one finds contentious approval of police use of force. Minorities and women are more likely to question the acceptability of police behaviors in those cases.

Indeed, the more clearly officers can justify behaviors with the threats they face by their suspects, the more consensus approval they will receive. On the other hand, the more critics of police behaviors convincingly point to the lack of threat an officer faces, the more the public’s resolve will be raised in opposition to the police behaviors—even men and whites will agree that the police were acting improperly. Clearly, however, the most effective strategy for a department defending its officers would be to “muddy” the understanding of a scenario because it will be assured of majority approval for its officers’ behaviors even if minorities and women are less likely to become convinced.

Like all research, our study faces some limitations, most of which are derived from using data from a survey not focused on police use of force. The most notable limitation is the inability to use more sophisticated measures of concepts. For example, *Fear of Neighborhood Crime* does not adequately measure respondents’ residential experiences. Moreover, our scenarios of police violence are arguably minor, involving only striking a citizen, compared with some cases of violence that introduce the risk of death.

The second limitation is not having variables in the data that have been associated with approval of police violence. Studies looking specifically at attitudes toward police use of force found that crime victimization, or fear of becoming a crime victim, increases support for police violence (Arthur 1993;

Arthur and Case 1994; Rennison 2000), but are less likely to support police use of force (Arthur 1993; Arthur and Case 1994; Cullen et al. 1996). Unfortunately, our research does not adequately clarify the contradictions in previous research using these variables. However, the lack of an effect for *Fear of Neighborhood Crime* may indicate that fear of becoming a victim of crime has little to do with approval of police use of force.

The goal of this study was to further the knowledge about how various factors influence attitudes toward police violence. This study reinforces that race plays a very important role in determining attitudes toward police violence, but shows that sex is also important. Other factors may not be as relevant as stated elsewhere. Researchers have the responsibility to dig even deeper, looking at what specifically makes minorities and women's views unique. In addition, approval of police use of force is influenced by publicized events (Flanagan and Vaughn 1996; Leff, Protess, and Brooks 1986; Lasley 1994; Weitzer 2002), so it is also important that social scientists investigate how attitudes regarding police use of force may have changed in recent years. Further, we must make a more comprehensive effort to document which factors currently influence positive or negative attitudes toward police violence. Rather than utilizing secondary data, it may be necessary for social scientists to collect data from a representative national sample that includes even more dimensions of power and focuses on attitudes toward police use of force, including variation in the type of victim, officer, force, and context.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>We are not aware of research evidence consistent or inconsistent with this finding for minorities in other majority-black cities in the United States.

<sup>2</sup>However, in their research, Cullen et al. (1996) found that gender does not have a significant effect on attitudes toward police use of force.



<sup>3</sup>We use mean substitution for the following variables: *Income*, 59 cases; *Political Views*, 33 cases; components of *Favor Government Assistance*, 31 cases; and components of *Confidence in Institutions*, 34 cases. In other analyses, available upon request, we created a variable indicating whether cases were affected by substitution and entered it into the complete models. The variable was not significant and shows that mean substitution does not change the pattern of results.

<sup>4</sup>We do not use mean substitution for our dependent variables, approving of a policeman striking: an adult male citizen, 29 cases; an escaping citizen, 19 cases; a citizen attacking with fists, 9 cases; a murder suspect, 11 cases; and a citizen saying obscenities, 6 cases. We do not use mean substitution for binary or categorical independent variables with missing cases: *High School*, 1 case; and *Fear Neighborhood Crime*, 11 cases.

<sup>5</sup>Although *Black* effects are not significant at the  $p < .05$  level in Model 2 for *Citizen Attacking-Fists*.

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**Appendix**  
Variables and Coding Schemes Used to Analyze Approval of Police Striking a Citizen in Five Scenarios Taken from  
the 1998 General Social Survey

Variable	Coding Scheme
<i>Independent Variables</i>	
<u>Demographics</u>	
1. Black	<i>What race do you consider yourself?</i> 0 = Other or white; 1 = Black
2. Other	0 = Black or white; 1 = Other
3. Female	0 = Male; 1 = Female
4. High School	0 = More than high school; 1 = High school or less
5. Income	Total Family Income: 1 = under \$20K; 2 = \$20–\$39.999K; 3 = \$40–\$59.999K; 4 = \$60–\$89.999K; 5 = over \$90K
6. Age	Coded in years
7. Never Married	<i>Are you currently—married, widowed, divorced, separated, or have you never been married?</i> 0 = Married or formerly married; 1 = Never married
8. Formerly Married	0 = Married or never married; 1 = Formerly married

Social Attitudes

## 9. Political Views

*Where would you place yourself on this scale?*

Range: 1 = Extremely liberal; 7 = Extremely conservative

## 10. Favor Government Assistance

Scale (range: 1–5) comprised of two items:

[Helppoor] *Some people think that the government in Washington should do everything possible to improve the standard of living of all poor Americans . . . Other people think it is not the government's responsibility, and that each person should take care of himself . . . Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?* 1 = People; 3 = Agree with both; 5 = Government

[Helpblack] *Some people think that (Blacks/Negroes/African Americans) have been discriminated against for so long that the government has a special obligation to help improve their living standards. Others believe that the government should not be giving special treatment to (Blacks/Negroes/African Americans). Where would you place yourself on this scale, or haven't you made up your mind on this?*

1 = No special treatment; 3 = Agree with both; 5 = Government help

11. Fear Neighborhood Crime  
*afraid to walk alone at night?**Is there any area right around here—that is, within a mile—where you would be*  
0 = No; 1 = Yes

## 12. Confidence in Institutions

Scale (range: 1–3) comprised of six items:

*I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them?* 1 = Hardly any; 2 = Only some; 3 = A great deal

[Confinan] Banks and financial institutions

[Conmedic] Medicine

[Conlegis] Congress

[Conarmy] Military

[Coneduc] Education

[Conpress] Press

Appendix  
(continued)

Variable	Coding Scheme
<i>Dependent Variables</i>	
<u>Approve of Policeman Striking:</u>	
13. Adult Male	<i>Are there any situations you can imagine in which you would approve of a policeman striking an adult male citizen?</i>
	0 = No; 1 = Yes
14. Citizen Escaping	<i>Would you approve of a policeman striking a citizen who: Was attempting to escape from custody?</i>
	0 = No; 1 = Yes
15. Citizen Attacking-Fists	<i>Was attacking the policeman with his fists?</i>
	0 = No; 1 = Yes
16. Murder Suspect	<i>Was being questioned as a suspect in a murder case?</i>
	0 = No; 1 = Yes
17. Citizen Saying Obscenities	<i>Had said vulgar and obscene things to the policeman?</i>
	0 = No; 1 = Yes

Note: Questions are taken from the General Social Survey (Davis and Smith 1999). Not all response options are elaborated here, and response options may have been recoded.